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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1337
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3383
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: Joint Bishkek Embassy - Manas Air Base School Renovation
Project Breaks New Ground

¶1. (U) On April 14, Ambassador gave remarks at a groundbreaking ceremony for a school renovation project in Birdik village. The project was developed by the Embassy's Office of Military Cooperation (OMC), funded by CENTCOM, and is being implemented in cooperation with Manas Air Base. The ceremony was attended by the Base Commander and other Base personnel, local dignitaries, village residents, and local press representatives. Village residents literally stood in line to thank the OMC Chief, who shepherded the project through several lengthy approval processes.

¶2. (U) Since the closure of a Soviet-era chicken processing plant and the school that it supported, there has been no school in Birdik, a small village about one hour's drive from Bishkek. With no available bus service, older children have had to make a rugged three kilometer hike to a neighboring village to attend school, while younger children have been effectively cut off from educational opportunities.

¶3. (U) Three years ago, OMC recognized that a relatively small investment could make a significant and concrete improvement in the lives of the residents of Birdik by giving their children the opportunity to attend school. Equally important, this investment presented a public diplomacy opportunity to show that the United States' interests and activities in Kyrgyzstan extend well beyond Manas Air Base.

¶4. (U) OMC has previously assisted in renovating three schools and an orphanage, but the scale of the Birdik school project posed a challenge. This project involved reconstructing the school around the gutted concrete walls of the previous school, and the necessary level of funding exceeded the contracting authority of the Embassy's officers. The project was at an impasse until the Ambassador raised it personally with General Petraeus of CENTCOM during his January visit to Bishkek and sought his help. As the result, the Commander of Manas Air Base provided a way around the difficulty by agreeing that the Base's contracting office could perform the necessary contracting work. When complete, the building will provide spaces for up to 250 children in grades K-4 to attend school.

¶5. (U) Comment: Several local newspapers, including Vecherney Bishkek, the country's largest circulation paper, covered the event, and both the Embassy and the Base garnered excellent press.

